

Article

Contestation and Adaptation: The Politics of National Identity in China by Enze Han. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 204pp., £47.99, ISBN 9780199936298

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Contestation and Adaptation: The Politics of National Identity in China by **Enze Han**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 204pp., £47.99, ISBN 9780199936298

Nation building is one of the big issues that matters to almost every country, and this volume by Enze Han contributes much towards our understanding in this field. Although the discussions in Han's book are mainly set in the context of modern China, there is substantial food for thought for everyone to take home.

Han skillfully uses a single theoretical framework to explain why the politics of Chinese nation building succeeds among some ethnic minority groups while failing among others. He argues that the international dimension is essential for understanding such variation. According to Han, groups without external kinship ties often tend either to keep the *status quo* or to assimilate into the mainstream Chinese national identity. However, groups with external kinship ties appear

to be much more heterogamous in terms of their reaction towards Chinese nation building. First, those with worse living conditions than their external kin and with external support for independence or rebellion are more likely to resist China's nation-building efforts. Second, members of ethnic minority groups which suffer worse living conditions than their external kin but receive no external support often either emigrate or adapt to the conditions within the current state. Third, groups that enjoy better living conditions than their external kin but somehow still receive external support for independence normally choose either to 'maintain a low-intensity national identity contestation' (p. 16) or to adapt to the *status quo*. Finally, groups with better living conditions than their external kin but without external support either keep the *status quo* or assimilate into the mainstream Chinese national identity.

Han's analytical framework is neat and elegant. His subsequent empirical chapters on the politics of national identity among five ethnic minority groups in China (the Uyghurs, the Chinese Koreans, the Mongols, the Dai and the Tibetans) are substantial and consistent. In addition, he also manages briefly to cover the historical dynamics of China's nation-building politics, making this comprehensive and insightful book a must-read for anyone interested in either China or the politics of national identity.

Han successfully bridges the long-existing divide between studies on China's domestic politics and those on its external relations. Yet, although Han takes history seriously, his analytical framework is by and large a static model. The model does its job well, but an inspired reader might want to reflect further on the directions of causality. For example, wouldn't it be possible that the external support is more likely to be offered to contesting ethnic groups than to other groups in the first place?

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